



Personal Reflections

10/9/2019

Dear IMSA Family,

Special Note: On September 21, before the incident with the Black doll, I was about to send the IMSA community the following Personal Reflection. Because of the events that transpired, I put it aside and wrote a different Reflection. As a follow up to my last writing, we are addressing persons involved in the incident through our disciplinary process. We may never identify all the individuals. For now, I ask you to continue to be generous in your thinking and belief that we have addressed this matter and will follow up with all concerned in the most appropriate ways possible.

As I wrote to you last year during the 2018-2019 Academic Year, IMSA conducted a “Year of Inquiry” focused on student mental health. Through town hall meetings, interviews, focus groups, literature reviews, and data analysis of different surveys completed by IMSA students, we sought to understand deeply the factors impacting student mental health at IMSA. The results of the Year of Inquiry were three recommendations to be considered during the 2019-2020 Academic Year, mainly:

- Implement an Academy-wide major assessments master calendar
- Establish a policy and practice of "no homework" to be assigned over extended weekends and "no major assessments" on the first day of class following extended weekends
- Increase focus on sleep education and incentivize positive sleep behaviors

I am pleased to provide you an update on our progress toward the implementation of each of these recommendations. Before I do, however, I have to say how proud I am of the students and staff who engaged with us and continue to be engaged in the Year of Inquiry. I also want to acknowledge the leadership of Ms. Katie Berger, Chief Student Affairs Officer, and Dr. Amber Stitzel Pareja, Executive Director of the Office of Institutional Research, for their leadership in this matter.

Year of Inquiry Progress

I. The Academy is piloting a "major assessment master calendar" impacting 80% of juniors. Below are some of the details of this pilot:

- If a student has three or more major in-class assessments (includes exams and assessments executed in class, not projects and papers that are done outside of class) on the same day, the student may rearrange one of the assessments. The student is encouraged to talk directly with their teachers but may also petition through the Principal's Office at least four days in advance of the assessment. Students who are uncomfortable approaching their teachers or who are experiencing difficulty rearranging an assessment should see Ms. Janine Hines or Ms. Diane Hinterlong in the Principal's Office.
- The intent of this calendar is to focus on personalization for the student. It is up to the student to make note of when/if they have three or more major in-class assessments and



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they need to speak to their teachers about this to see if they can move one of the assessments. This tool is not meant to change an assessment in an entire class if it only affects a few students (those few students can request accommodations).

II. Together with the Principal's Office, we have established that "no homework" is to be assigned over extended weekends and "no major assessments" (any assignment with a 10% or more weight on a student grade) is due on the first day of class following extended weekends.

III. The division of Student Affairs, under Ms. Berger's direction, is conducting sleep education and working with resident counselors and student council to identify incentives for students to develop better sleep habits.

Personal Note

On a personal note, I have become convinced of the critical importance of sleep and advantage for enhanced performance. My increased commitment to sleep is based on both my personal experiences, and on my professional readings. I am trying to get, on average, seven or eight hours of sleep. I do this by going to bed earlier. I'm usually in bed by nine. In this way, I can get up by four or five in the morning to begin my day with meditation and exercise.

How do I do this? By setting an alarm to go to bed. You read that right. If I set an alarm to go to bed, I don't usually need an alarm to get up out of bed. At about seven or eight in the evening, I begin to prepare for sleep by shutting down electronics, preparing my bedroom (lowering the thermostat), and reading from a book. Then, it's time for my meditation in bed.

It's been working. The days don't seem as foggy. I am more alert and energetic during the day. I feel even better when I sleep for eight or nine hours!

If you believe this is impossible, see the following famous people cited in her excellent 2016 book, *The Sleep Revolution: Transforming Your Life, One Night at a Time* by Arianna Huffington.

- CEO Jeff Bezos told the *Wall Street Journal*, "I'm more alert and I think more clearly. I just feel so much better all day long if I've had eight hours."
- Warren Buffett said this in a 2008 Letter to Shareholders of Berkshire Hathaway: "When forced to choose, I will not trade even a night's sleep for the chance of extra profits."
- Roger Federer says, "If I don't sleep eleven to twelve hours a day, it's not right. If I don't have that amount of sleep, I hurt myself."
- LeBron James tries to get twelve hours of sleep per day when he's training.
- Tom Brady goes to bed at 8:30 p.m. He says, "The decisions that I make always center around performance enhancement. I want to be the best I can be every day."



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Mental Health Initiatives (MHI) Week

Last week, we shined a light on mental health and wellness with a week dedicated to special speakers, including alumna Dr. Amanda Kracen '94, the sharing of mental health resources available at IMSA, therapy dogs and personal experiences shared by staff about how they de-stress. New this year, student (and adult) speakers shared their own mental health stories. This year's Mental Health Initiatives week was another way for IMSA to surface the importance of wellness. As Ray Chang '20, President of Student Council put it, "I hope that this week left you all with something worth remembering, whether it is the realization that you're not alone, or that you, your friends', and your colleagues' mental health matter. I hope that this week has encouraged you to keep talking about mental health, to keep fighting stigma, and to keep taking care of yourselves."

Donations to support IMSA's efforts regarding students' mental health are welcome. Gifts can be made by check, payable to the IMSA Fund for Advancement of Education designated to mental health initiative. For online giving, [click here](#) and note mental health initiatives in the comments box.

Many thanks for all that you do.

Respectfully,
José M. Torres, Ph.D.
President